

horticulture

for the home gardener



GROWING BULBS AND BULB-LIKE PLANTS IN CONTAINERS

Many advantages are obtained by today's modern homeowners and apartment dwellers by growing flowering bulbs in pots and containers. A few pots of carefully selected bulbs in strategic locations can brighten up porches, patios, or even room interiors. When grown in containers, they need only be displayed when they reach their peak at blooming time. Bulbs have the distinction of being called the easiest plants in the world to grow. This remains true even when grown in containers.

BULBS

Almost any bulb grown in the ground can be grown in a container. Some are easier and more commonly grown in containers than others. When selecting bulbs for containers, choose only plump, healthy bulbs with no sign of decay or disease. The old rule of 'biggest is best' doesn't always apply when buying bulbs for containers. The biggest bulbs sometimes produce flowers that get too big for a container. However, don't choose the smallest bulbs hoping to economize, as they will usually give only a few small and often poorly developed flowers. Bulbs of medium size or medium grades will generally give the best results when grown in containers.

CONTAINERS

The containers in which you plant your bulbs needn't be limited to clay or plastic flower pots. The only requirement is that it should be full size (not a shallow pan) and have a drainage hole in the bottom so excess water can drain out of the soil. Bulbs are often planted in wooden tubs, planter boxes, metal containers or decorative pots made of various materials.

SOIL MIX

Commercially prepared soil mixes can be used to fill your container or you can make your own soil mix by combining equal parts of garden soil, sand, organic material (peat moss, redwood shavings, leafmold). The resulting mix should be rather light and pourous for best bulb growth. Water should drain quickly through it so the bulbs don't remain in soggy wet soil for a long period of time.

Bulbs planted in containers are rarely planted as deeply as when planted outdoors. The tip of the bulb is usually placed right at or just barely under the soil level. Firm the soil gently around the bulbs being sure to leave about an inch of space between the soil level and the rim of the pot to allow for watering.

CULTURE

The containers of bulbs can now be put away out of sight until growth begins. A dark cool place is best for winter and spring blooming bulbs. Frequently, the pots are buried in holes or trenches and covered with wood shavings, peat moss, or sand. Others simply set the pots in an out-of-the-way place and cover them with a box. Simple frames can be constructed and covered with black plastic if you have many planted containers. Root growth will start very quickly so the soil must not be allowed to dry out completely.

(OVER)

After the bulbs have been planted for 8 to 10 weeks, top growth should start. When you see the pale yellow or white shoots appearing, the container should be moved out into the full sun or remain in the shade (see below) to allow the leaves and stem to turn green. Keep the soil moist while the bulbs are actively growing; the containers may need to be watered daily. When flower color shows, the containers can be moved to their desired places, preferably in the shade with a considerable amount of light. Make sure tall flowers don't get top heavy and fall over. Small stakes of bamboo can help support these tall growers. Bimonthly feedings of half strength fertilizer, such as 10-5-5, is generally sufficient for bulbs.

After flowering is over, many people toss the entire plant away, but some bulbs can be saved and used in the garden next year. Bulbs grown in containers one year shouldn't be saved and put in containers the next year again as they are generally weak and won't perform well. If you wish to use the bulbs in the garden, gently tip the bulbs from the pots without disturbing the rootball and plant it in a sunny garden location. After the foliage matures and turns yellow, the bulbs should be lifted from the soil and stored or left in the ground to overwinter depending on the bulb type.

Bulbs Especially Adapted to Container Culture

Fall planting - Mid-November

Anemone - Sun

Ranunculus - Sun

Colchicum - Sun

Watsonia - Sun

Dutch Iris - Sun

Crocus - Shade

Freesia - Sun

Daffodils - Shade

Grape Hyacinth - Sun

Scilla - Shade

Narcissus - Sun

Tuberose - Shade

Oxalis - Sun

Tulips & Hyacinth - purchase early and refrigerate 8 weeks prior to planting.
Shade

Spring planting - March

Allium - Sun

Caladium - Shade

Gladiolus (dwarfs) - Sun

Gloriosa Lily - Shade

Amaryllis - Shade

Tuberous Begonias - Shade

Blood Lily - Shade